

COLORADO

San Luis Valley Public Lands Center



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BLM and the Forest Service Join Forces to Manage Public Lands in the San Luis Valley

By Alexa Bainbridge

“

Hello. Welcome to the new San Luis Valley Public Lands Center. We are committed to serving you. How can I answer either your Bureau of Land Management or Forest Service questions?”

This is the type of greeting you will now receive when you walk into the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center (SLVPLC) located in Monte Vista, Colorado. The SLVPLC was created by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service (FS) in order to provide the most efficient, effective management of public and national forest system lands in the area.

Yes, but what does that mean to me?

It means a one-stop shop for all your BLM and FS needs. It means a smoother running organization where whoever is in the office can help you because BLM and FS employees have the knowledge of both agencies in order to help you. It is also better for the lands because with shared resources and a larger pool of specialists, both the BLM and the FS are better able to manage the land and its resources.

For a local rancher with both BLM and FS grazing permits, valuable time won't have to be spent trying to talk with both BLM and FS personnel in order to make range management decisions. By walking into one office all questions can be answered from someone who has first hand knowledge no matter whether that person wears a brown (BLM) or green (FS) uniform.

Diann Gese, a BLM geologist, manages the minerals and geology program for both the BLM San Luis Valley and the FS Rio Grande National Forest. Through



Newly constructed sign at San Luis Valley Public Lands headquarters in Monte Vista. Petroglyph designs are the same as those found on public lands in the San Luis Valley. Sign was designed by Forest Landscape Architect Kelly Ortiz and BLM Rec Planner Mark Marshall.



a formal agreement, the FS provides funds for half of Gese's time although she is a BLM employee. Gese feels that this agreement is a more efficient and effective use of funding. "By sharing positions and their financial burdens, BLM and FS are able to retain experienced professionals, provide seamless service to the public, and ultimately better manage our public lands," says Gese.

But this is not a new concept for the San Luis Valley. The area has had dual delegated field offices (the Saguache, Divide, and La Jara field offices) for six years. In fact for the last year if you needed maps, general information, or permits for firewood, Christmas trees, vegetation, or recreation for either BLM or FS lands, they could go to either agency to get the process started. And, because a fire raging across the land does not recognize lines drawn on a map, forests were trimmed and cleaned in order to control future fires on public lands managed by both the BLM and the FS through the Fuels and Timber Stewardship project, a BLM/FS joint project.

In April of 2004, BLM and FS dual delegated the Forest Supervisor and Associate Center Manager positions in order to better serve the public and manage public lands. Soon after the dual delegation was signed, a benefit of dual management was immediately recognized when the Forest Supervisor, a FS employee, was sent on an assignment in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the Associate Center Manager, a BLM employee, was able to step in as Forest Supervisor/Center Manager for four months.

Vince Spero, Forest Archeologist for the Rio Grande National Forest is also responsible for the BLM cultural resource program. Since 1997 he has seen the benefits of dual delegation, "Service First allows both agencies to leverage their money in order to better administer the cultural resource program. Having first-hand knowledge of cultural resources on adjoining BLM lands helps provide the archeological context for the entire San Luis Valley. This allows FS and BLM to provide increased protection and preservation of cultural resource sites for the public's enjoyment."

The recent creation of the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center has seen Peter Clark, Forest Supervisor and BLM Center Manager, put into a dual position managing both BLM and FS lands. This will be a challenging job as he will need to be cognizant of the priorities of each organization when making his decisions and he will also be held accountable by each organization. It is also important because Congress delegates money separately to the BLM and FS, and the money given to each agency must be used for that agency's lands. However, Congress also allows the agencies to work together and help each other. This has led to an Interagency Agreement that transfers funds between the agencies to allow them to pay for resources, such as personnel, to help with joint projects.

BLM is proud to be a part of the new San Luis Valley Public Lands Center and sees it as a great benefit to the public and both federal agencies.



Volunteers help build a fence to protect historic wagon ruts on BLM land near Del Norte on Public Lands Day.

For more information, contact BLM Center Manager/Forest Supervisor Peter Clark at 719.852.6247 or BLM Associate Center Manager/Deputy Forest Supervisor Jim Rhett at 719.852.6274.